

Service of Prayer and Preaching  
March 22, 2020 – the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Welcome and Announcements

Opening Hymn: LSB 427, In the Cross of Christ I Glory

1 In the cross of Christ I glo - ry, Tow'r - ing  
2 When the woes of life o'er - take me, Hopes de -  
3 When the sun of bliss is beam - ing Light and  
4 Bane and bless - ing, pain and plea - sure By the  
o'er the wrecks of time. All the light of sa - cred  
ceive, and fears an - noy, Nev - er shall the cross for -  
love up - on my way, From the cross the ra - diance  
cross are sanc - ti - fied; Peace is there that knows no  
sto - ry Gath - ers round its head sub - lime.  
sake me; Lo, it glows with peace and joy.  
stream - ing Adds more lus - ter to the day.  
mea - sure, Joys that through all time a - bide.

Tune and text: Public domain

Opening Responsory

P: This is the day which the Lord has made;

C: **Let us rejoice and be glad in it!**

P: From the rising of the sun to its setting,

C: **the name of the Lord is to be praised.**

P: Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful,

C: **slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil.**

P: Jesus said: if any man would come after Me,

C: **let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.**

P: Christ was wounded for our transgressions.

C: **He was bruised for our iniquities.**

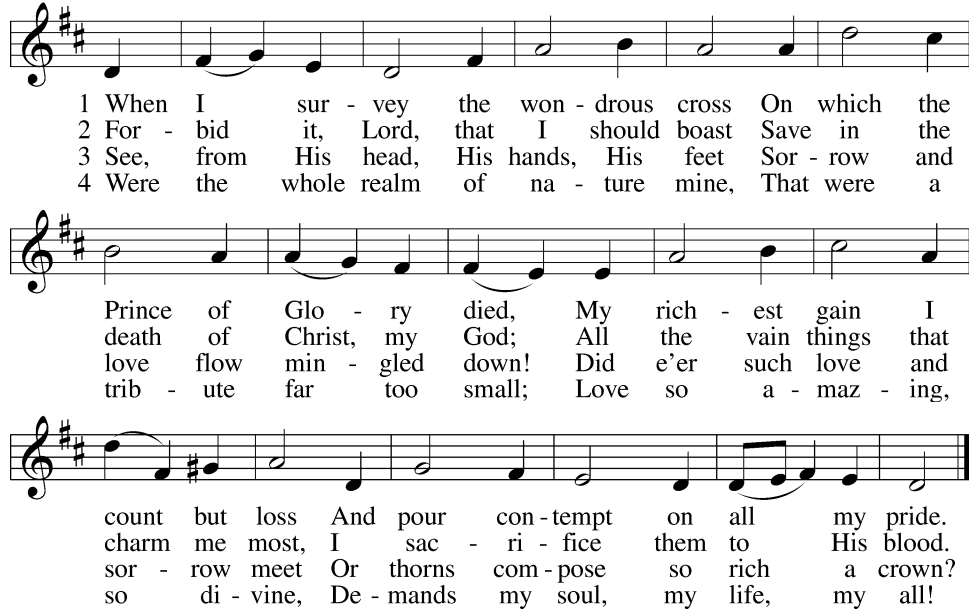
P: From the rising of the sun to its setting,

C: **the name of the Lord is to be praised.**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**

**As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Hymn: LSB 426, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross**



1 When I sur - vey the won - drous cross On which the  
2 For - bid it, Lord, that I should boast Save in the  
3 See, from His head, His hands, His feet Sor - row and  
4 Were the whole realm of na - ture mine, That were a  
Prince of Glo - ry died, My rich - est gain I  
death of Christ, my God; All the vain things that  
love flow min - gled down! Did e'er such love and  
trib - ute far too small; Love so a - maz - ing,  
count but loss And pour con - tempt on all my pride.  
charm me most, I sac - ri - fice them to His blood.  
sor - row meet Or thorns com - pose so rich a crown?  
so di - vine, De - mands my soul, my life, my all!

**Readings from Holy Scripture**

*Isaiah 42:14-21*

- <sup>14</sup> For a long time I have held my peace;  
I have kept still and restrained myself;  
now I will cry out like a woman in labor;  
I will gasp and pant.
- <sup>15</sup> I will lay waste mountains and hills,  
and dry up all their vegetation;  
I will turn the rivers into islands,  
and dry up the pools.
- <sup>16</sup> And I will lead the blind  
in a way that they do not know,  
in paths that they have not known  
I will guide them.  
I will turn the darkness before them into light,  
the rough places into level ground.  
These are the things I do,  
and I do not forsake them.
- <sup>17</sup> They are turned back and utterly put to shame,  
who trust in carved idols,  
who say to metal images,  
“You are our gods.”

<sup>18</sup> Hear, you deaf,  
and look, you blind, that you may see!  
<sup>19</sup> Who is blind but my servant,  
or deaf as my messenger whom I send?  
Who is blind as my dedicated one,  
or blind as the servant of the LORD?  
<sup>20</sup> He sees many things, but does not observe them;  
his ears are open, but he does not hear.  
<sup>21</sup> The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake,  
to magnify his law and make it glorious.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God!**

*Ephesians 5:8-14*

<sup>8</sup> For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God!**

*John 9:1-41*

As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup> Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup> and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

<sup>8</sup> The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" <sup>9</sup> Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." <sup>10</sup> So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" <sup>11</sup> He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes

and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."<sup>12</sup> They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

<sup>13</sup> They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup> Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup> So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." <sup>16</sup> Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. <sup>17</sup> So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

<sup>18</sup> The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight <sup>19</sup> and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" <sup>20</sup> His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. <sup>21</sup> But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." <sup>22</sup> (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) <sup>23</sup> Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

<sup>24</sup> So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." <sup>25</sup> He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." <sup>26</sup> They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" <sup>27</sup> He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" <sup>28</sup> And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup> We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." <sup>30</sup> The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. <sup>32</sup> Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." <sup>34</sup> They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" <sup>36</sup> He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." <sup>38</sup> He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." <sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we

also blind?" <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God!**

### Lenten Responsory

P: We have an advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

C: **He was delivered up to death; He was crucified for the sins of the people.**

P: Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

C: **He was delivered up to death; He was crucified for the sins of the people.**

P: We have an advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

C: **He was delivered up to death; He was crucified for the sins of the people.**

### Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

Born of the virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Christian Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn: LSB 571, God Loved the World So That He Gave



|   |        |          |      |        |        |           |        |      |             |         |
|---|--------|----------|------|--------|--------|-----------|--------|------|-------------|---------|
| 1 | God    | loved    | the  | world  | so     | that      | He     | gave | His         | on - ly |
| 2 | Christ | Je - sus | is   | the    | ground | of        | faith, | Who  | was         | made    |
| 3 | God    | would    | not  | have   | the    | sin - ner | die;   | His  | Son         | with    |
| 4 | Be     | of       | good | cheer, | for    | God's     | own    | Son  | For - gives | all     |

Son the lost to save, That all who would in  
flesh and suf - fered death; All then who trust in  
sav - ing grace is nigh; His Spir - it in the  
sins which you have done; And, jus - ti - fied by  
Him be - lieve Should ev - er - last - ing life re - ceive.  
Him a - lone Are built on this chief cor - ner - stone.  
Word de - clares How we in Christ are heav - en's heirs.  
Je - sus' blood, Your Bap - tism grants the high - est good.

- 5 If you are sick, if death is near,  
This truth your troubled heart can cheer:  
Christ Jesus saves your soul from death;  
That is the firmest ground of faith.
- 6 Glory to God the Father, Son,  
And Holy Spirit, Three in One!  
To You, O blessèd Trinity,  
Be praise now and eternally!

## Sermon

Absolute darkness is actually rather difficult to find these days, even at night. For one thing, there's so many street lights, head lights, and so forth that in many places the night is lit quite brightly. Here in Pascagoula, the lights from Ingalls and Chevron make the whole sky glow. Inside, our many devices have little glowing lights and displays. Even without all those artificial sources, there's still the moon and stars, except on the cloudiest nights. But have you ever had the experience of going down underground, into a cave and having all the lights turned off? That's real darkness, in a place where the light of the sun or moon can never reach. It's darkness so complete it feels almost tangible, darkness you feel you could cut with a knife.

This darkness hides things. If you're in such a cave without a light, who knows what dangers may be lurking there? Animals that could harm you hiding in the cave, open shafts and holes you could fall down, sharp rocks or low ceilings to be hurt on – we rely a lot on our vision to be aware of our surroundings, so if you find yourselves without a way to see around you, in such darkness, you become acutely aware of your vulnerability.

But sometimes we like the darkness, for the same reason – it hides whatever may be lurking. Because it also hides what we're doing from other people. We talk about things done in secret being done “under the cover of darkness,” away from prying eyes that could see what we're up to. I think we're probably familiar with the way Scripture sometimes talks about our sins in this way, about walking in darkness. Jesus talks about people who love darkness rather than light, because their works are evil. We also read

that Christ is the light that shines into the darkness of this world. We are encouraged to cast off the works of darkness, the kind of things we feel should be done secretly, the shameful things we don't want others to see us doing.

But here in Ephesians, we read something more than that. In verse 8, Paul tells us that we were darkness, and now we are light. Not just that our sinful words and actions reflected darkness, and our good deeds in Christ reflect his light – but that, as human beings, depending on our relationship to God or the lack thereof, we are darkness or we are light. It's not just about what we do, what we say, or so forth; those are just reflections of our central identity, who we really are deep down. How do we identify ourselves?

That's a sobering comparison, perhaps. Apart from Christ, who is the great light of the world, we are in fact darkness in our very identity. The darkness seeps into us and becomes who we are; our sin is inseparable from ourselves, and we can't see ourselves without it. We see this, don't we? When people identify themselves by a particular sin, when they take pride in that sin and brag about it.

Too often, the works of darkness are no longer considered shameful and kept under the cover of darkness; too often, the works of darkness are celebrated and splashed on the front page. Paul describes some of them in the verses just before the beginning of this passage: idolatry, greed, sexual sins, crude language and dirty jokes, a lack of mercy and compassion for the weak and vulnerable people in our world – these are all sins that you can find plenty of people today not only committing, but even defending, people who argue that they are, in fact, good or okay things to do. The darkness is all around us.

But we are no longer defined by that darkness. Paul's words in Ephesians are both a warning and a reassurance. He reassures us by reminding us that we are not the darkness anymore; we were darkness, he says, but now we are light. This is who you are! Your identity is based on Christ. We were sin, but as we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Christ was made to be sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God – so that we might become light, as he is light.

Elsewhere in Scripture, the effect of Baptism is receiving a new name from God, a new identity, a whole new "you". Now you are light in the Lord! You are not defined by your sin, whatever it may be that you still struggle with. The last verse of this reading is thought by many scholars to be a quotation of a verse from a very early hymn, probably a hymn for baptism: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." In our hymnal, we also have a hymn based on this line, "Awake, O sleeper, arise from death." You are defined by the light of Christ, who is the great light of the world.

And so, Paul encourages us to "walk as children of light," to let this light who we now are to be shown to others in our lives. Walk as children of the light – walking is something that comes naturally to us, one of the first big things we learn in life. Most people walk before they talk, before they read or write or do most other things, and so we don't really remember learning to walk for the first time. But this made me think of the way a child learns to walk. We watched that process with both of our boys: around

the age of two, they're walking pretty well, but it's still not perfect. In fact, at nearly two and a half, Joseph is still in this stage: he still toddles around, he may have trouble with stairs, and sometimes he just trips and falls for what seems like no reason at all, that he just got tangled up in his own feet. If our Christian life is characterized like walking as children, we know we're going to stumble and fall sometimes. As much as we celebrate a baby's first steps, learning to walk is a process, not an event.

As we learn how to walk as children of light, we need this Lenten reminder: take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. Remember that you are no longer a part of the darkness, but have become light; you are with Christ. That's who you are, in your baptism! So be true to your identity in Christ, avoid the works of darkness, and instead bear the fruit of light. As we're reminded in this Lenten time, repent and return to the Lord – that is one of these fruits. We see the same in Romans chapter 7: true, we are not perfect during this life, even as Christians who are empowered by the Spirit to act in Godly ways. We still find ourselves doing the bad things we want to avoid instead of the good things we want to do. But we are no longer defined by the darkness, by the sin.

We are defined now by Christ, and are children of the light by our baptism into Christ. So now, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we listen to the encouragement sent to the Ephesians: strive to show the fruit of the light, in all that is good and right and true. In all these things, we simply reflect the light of Christ, because he is goodness and righteousness and truth.

How do we strive here to be the light? What opportunities are there for you to reach out, to be brave and take the risk and speak to a person in your life about the light of Christ, someone who may not know or may have slipped away back into this world and its darkness? What opportunities do you have to show the light of Christ by loving and serving others? What could we do as a congregation toward this goal, to be a beacon of light in this city?

Today's circumstances are a golden opportunity. I hope that's how we all look at this coronavirus crisis – as an opportunity, not a threat. Disease can do nothing to us compared to what God offers us in Christ, so being set free from personal fear, we're free to serve and love our neighbors. To many people, those who are spooked and anxious by all this, the darkness seems to be closing in. But we walk as children of light! We are, as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, the light of the world, so let us not hide our light under a basket!

Check on your friends and neighbors regularly. If you're in a group who is at lower risk, offer to run errands or bring supplies to those who are at higher risk and aren't venturing out. Everyone, no matter what your risk level or situation, everyone can continue to call others, encourage others. Everyone can pray for our congregation, for our community, for our world.

I'd like to leave you with an image from the earliest years of the Christian faith, under the authority of Rome. In that time, things were reversed – the works of darkness were done and celebrated in broad daylight, while the children of light were forced to gather under cover of darkness. The earliest Christians in the city of Rome sometimes



met together and worshiped in the catacombs under the city, the tunnels and vaults where the dead were buried. There, in secret, in the underground darkness, and surrounded by the tombs as a palpable reminder of the consequence of this darkness of sin in the world, there these believers worshipped and received communion and had fellowship together.

In the meantime, above them, the empire of pagan Rome was at its height. The emperors sometimes persecuted the Church, and the society of Rome gloried and took pleasure in so many of the works of darkness. The Christians hid and worshipped in the catacombs, while above them in the great Coliseum gladiators fought and bled and died, countless idols and false gods were worshipped in their temples, the imperial court showed off their decadence and hedonism, and Christians were martyred for their faith. Everything was turned upside down: the works of darkness were seen and glorified in broad daylight, while the light of the world shone in the dark catacombs.

That is what our experience in this world may feel like at times, that the darkness is in control in this world and about to overwhelm us, while the light of Christ is a weak, flickering, hidden thing. But the light will win and has already won. The Light of the world has come, and is coming again, and until that time we as his people, as the children of the light, shine his light into the world. No matter how dark it may seem, the light of Christ in the Church will never be extinguished.

### **Prayer**

P: In peace let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

P: For the gift of divine peace and of pardon, with all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

P: For the holy Christian Church, here and scattered throughout the world, and for the proclamation of the Gospel and the calling of all to faith, let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

P: For this nation, for our cities and communities, and for the common welfare of us all, let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

P: For seasonable weather and for the fruitfulness of the earth, let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

P: For those who labor, for those whose work is difficult or dangerous, and for all who travel, let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

P: For all those in need, for the hungry and homeless, for the widowed and orphaned, and for all those in prison, let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

P: For the sick and dying and for all those who care for them, let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

P: Finally, for these and for all our needs of body and soul, let us pray to the Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

### **Collect of the Day**

P: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

### **Collect for the Word**

P: Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

### **Morning Prayer** (*from the Small Catechism*)

All: **I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.**

### **Blessing**

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: **Thanks be to God!**

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: **Amen.**

# Closing Hymn: LSB 551, When to the World Our Savior Came



1 When to our world the Sav - ior came The sick and  
2 That good phy - si - cian! Night and day The peo - ple  
3 His prais - es then were heard and sung By o - pened  
4 Of long a - go: yet liv - ing still, Who died for  
5 His sov - 'reign pur - pose still re - mains Who rose in



help - less heard His name, And in their weak - ness  
thronged a - bout His way; And won - der ran from  
ears and loos - ened tongue, While light - ened eyes could  
us on Cal - v'ry's hill; Who tri - umphed o - ver  
pow'r, and lives and reigns; Till ev - 'ry tongue con -



longed to see The heal - ing Christ of Gal - i - lee.  
soul to soul, "The touch of Christ has made us whole!"  
see and know The heal - ing Christ of long a - go.  
cross and grave, His heal - ing hands stretched forth to save.  
fess His praise, The heal - ing Christ of all our days.